

Walking on Sunshine by kittenCorrosion

Series: [Stranger Teens \[1\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Emotional Hurt/Comfort, F/M, Fluff, Movie and Cuddles, Sweet, arguing as usual, but there's so much cuteness guys, headcanon alert, i was studying romanticism when i wrote this so it gets a lil mushy and sappy heh, like if you need mileven fluff i got you covered her, only rated teen for language, that's what this whole fic is about tbh, the gang is all here, they're all like fourteen it's cute right

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

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Summary:

What happens when five fourteen-year-olds are stuck inside on a hot summer day? Plenty of arguing, that's for sure, but in her quest to help her friends escape boredom, El ends up revealing something about herself that she's been hiding for a long time.

Walking on Sunshine

Author's Note:

hello everybody! it feels like forever since i posted something but i'm happy to be back.

just a head's up, this is in 1985, so they're young teens and this is before mike and el even started officially dating. my stories are all over my timeline so i apologize if that's confusing.

okay so i have a headcanon, a very amazing one if i may be so bold, and because of that headcanon this story came to be. i know it's a little overly sappy, i know the ending is cheesy and a little out of character, but honestly i love this story a lot and i hope you will too!

Summer 1985

It was late July and too damn hot and humid to venture out for more than fifteen minutes. The local pool had shut down the summer before due to a lack of funding, so Mike, El, Dustin, Lucas and Will were all laying around in the Wheeler's basement, again, trying to think of something to do. Will was listing off card and board games while Dustin and Lucas alternately shut him down.

"Uno?"

"Not again."

"Poker."

"We're broke, dude."

"Monopoly?"

"No, last time we played that Dustin threw a tantrum and knocked the board over before I could win."

“You cheated!”

“I did not!”

Lucas defended himself vehemently, face hostile, looking ready to jump up from the D&D table and tackle Dustin, who was pacing around. Mike and El were sprawled on the couch, El’s head laid sleepily on Mike’s shoulder as she dozed, the warm air making her drowsy. He was content to just sit there and watch her, but would occasionally glance up and make sure his friends weren’t going to actually kill each other. Will sighed from his seat on the stairs.

“That’s everything I can think of.”

Dustin looked over at Mike begrudgingly.

“Well I would be happy to play the new campaign if Mike would quit making out with El all the time and finish it already.”

It was a soft dig, but Mike bristled, trying not to disturb El, his face flushing.

“We don’t– It’s not... shut up, Dustin!”

Dustin shrugged, eyes mischievous, pointedly glancing at El still cozily snuggled into Mike’s side and raising an eyebrow. Mike reddened more.

“Well if you’re not making out by now then you’ve been sitting around and wasting precious campaign time for nothing.”

“It’s not wasting time! Just... ugh, shut up.”

They’d been teasing the pair ever since she returned, especially Dustin, who honestly just wanted them to get over it and date already. Lucas secretly agreed, slightly annoyed at his friend’s ever present embarrassment, but Will seemed neutral. He was protective of his adopted sister, but didn’t doubt Mike’s affection or commitment, so he usually abstained from commenting, deciding he’d rather just be supportive and not learn details.

There was a silence, Dustin giving up on taunting Mike, Will giving

up on trying to suggest anything, and Lucas giving up in general. El murmured something in her sleep, voice quiet and unintelligible, and the boys all looked at her as she sighed and shifted. It was a habit they'd noticed anytime she fell asleep around them.

"Do you ever understand what she says?" Lucas asked, curious. Will and Mike looked at each other and shrugged, both having spent the most time with sleeping El.

"I dunno," Mike spoke first, remembering a few other times she'd been cuddled against him, out cold and muttering something, "I've never really tried to figure it out."

Will nodded in agreement, thinking back to a few weeks ago when she'd conked out on the couch during a family movie night. He'd noticed it, but was more engrossed in watching Schwarzenegger kick ass than his sister sleep talking.

"Maybe she's speaking another language, or channeling something with her powers. Do you think..." Dustin trailed off, eyes wide, face serious, "Do you think she's talking to aliens?!"

Lucas snorted and gave Dustin a condescending glare, not even trying to hide how stupid he thought the idea was.

"Why in the *hell* would you even *think* that?"

They started arguing again, loudly, Dustin spitting out conspiracy theories and Lucas shooting each of them down. The raised voices caused El to jerk awake suddenly, she had the tendency to wake up violently from her naps, and Mike reached over to pat her hand.

"You okay?"

She looked at him, eyes still groggy and nodded, stretching like a cat and then yawning. She glanced around the room at the boys, realizing she hadn't missed anything during her short nap. They were obviously still stuck, unable to think of anything to do that didn't involve going outside into the heat. Perking up, she smiled and decided to reveal her secret

"Movie?"

The boys all knew that she knew that they didn't have any money, so they looked at each other, confused at her suggestion. Lucas cleared his throat.

"El, we're broke remem—"

She was shaking her head and he cut himself off, letting her clarify her thought.

"No, a video. Here."

With a satisfied smile she pulled a voucher for a free rental at the local video store from the pocket of her denim overall shorts. The boys came closer, gazing at it like it was a golden ticket.

"Where did you get that?" Lucas asked, slightly mad she hadn't told them earlier. She just shrugged, still smirking.

"Hop. Said it was for a rainy day." She glanced out the window towards the oppressive heat. "Or... hot day?"

It was a bad attempt at a joke but Mike snorted a laugh anyways, appreciating her humor. Dustin snatched the voucher from her, almost cradling it in his hands. To the bored teens it was like winning the lottery. Mike gave her an appreciative smile, but Will's voice reminded them of the reason they were stuck inside anyways.

"Okay, but, who's going to go get it?"

His question hung in the air and they all glanced outside again, shuddering at the oppressive sunshine. El shook her head and flopped back onto the couch, pointing at her contribution in their hands.

"Not me."

That was fair. The four boys rolled a die for it, and Lucas got a two, meaning he was the unlucky loser who had to bike to the store. He tied on his camo bandana and set off into the bouncing heat waves while the others sat around and played a few rounds of Uno, seeing as he had been the only one to really oppose it. When he got back he was soaked through with sweat, but had the VHS clutched firmly in his hand. After a shower, they had refused to let him anywhere near

them until he'd bathed, they gathered in the living room and El put in the movie.

"What'd you even get?" Dustin asked as the TV came alive with music.

Sylvester Stallone's face filled the screen and Lucas grinned wildly.

"Rambo: First Blood Part II. They just got it in."

The others groaned internally. That's what they got for letting him pick the movie. Mike slumped to the floor, back against the front of the couch, and El crawled over to him from where she had been kneeling in front of the TV, snagging a pillow from the couch and tossing it into his lap. She scooted closer, plopping herself in front of him and leaning back against the pillow. It was her favorite way to watch movies, and the guys were so used to it by now that not even Dustin bothered to give them crap for cuddling. It was just... Mike and El.

Will and Dustin settled on the couch, getting drawn into the action of the movie despite their reluctance. Lucas was cheering Rambo on from the La-Z-Boy, whooping at every on-screen explosion. Mike's eyes were glued to the screen, his fingers fidgeting with the ends of El's hair, which were tickling his legs. He brushed them off of him, smoothing the soft locks around her head. She sighed contentedly, starting to drowse again, the summer heat and comfortable position making her damn-near narcoleptic.

The movie dragged on, machine gun fire filling the living room, the sound turned up as high as it would go. On screen, Rambo was being dragged back to the enemy camp, about to be tortured. El murmured in her sleep, and Mike glanced down at her distractedly. A pair of Soviets appeared, beginning to interrogate him, heavy Russian accents barking commands. El's mumbling grew louder than usual, her voice harsh and not... normal. Mike and Dustin exchanged a glance and Dustin smacked the pause button on the remote, curious to hear what she was saying. At the same time one of the Soviets yelled something angrily in Russian, freezing on the screen and El sat up a bit, half-asleep and annoyed.

“*Vyi bleete kak baran!* ” She practically growled, falling back onto the pillow and rolling onto her side with a disgruntled sigh.

The room was dead silent.

Dustin and Lucas were staring at her, jaws dropped, while Will’s eyes had become saucers. Mike was utterly speechless, staring down at the napping girl in his lap.

“What the actual fu–”

“El?!”

“Did she just–”

They all started talking at once and Mike shushed them with a wave of his hands, gesturing towards her still-sleeping form. He spoke, but hushed.

“Did... did you guys hear...” he paused, “was that... *Russian?*”

“It had to have been,” Will whispered back, pointing to the angry Soviet still on the TV, “that’s what they were speaking.”

Lucas managed to pick his jaw up off the floor and stared at Mike and Will.

“Wait, wait, wait... *you two* didn’t even know about this? She didn’t tell *anyone??* ”

The two boys shook their heads frantically and Lucas continued on.

“You mean she’s been back for almost two years and been able to speak *Russian* and she *never told us about it?!?*”

His whisper slowly turned into a yell and Mike tried to shush him to no avail. El shot up, disgruntled and turned to glare at him. She blinked a few times before realizing that one, the movie was paused, and two, everyone was staring at her in disbelief. Dustin’s mouth was still hanging open, and she shrunk back, a bit cranky and defensive.

“What?” Her voice was annoyed but cautious.

Mike tried to find a way to be delicate, licking his lips nervously and glancing at the others.

“El... do... do you, um, speak any languages *other* than English?”

She glanced between him and Dustin’s disbelieving face, unsure, her eyes suddenly nervous.

“W-Why?”

Her voice was small, Mike could practically see her shrinking into herself like she did when she was afraid. He reached a hand out and captured one of hers, giving it a reassuring squeeze. Before he could answer, Dustin finally snapped out of his stupefied trance and practically screamed at her.

“YOU JUST YELLED IN RUSSIAN. FLUENT RUSSIAN. EL YOU CAN SPEAK RUSSIAN WHY DIDN’T YOU TELL US—”

Will reached over and smacked the excited boy across the back of the head *hard*, knocking his hat off and shutting him up. El looked like she was about to cry and her brother glared daggers at Dustin while Mike tried to reassure her.

“We’re not angry, don’t listen to Dustin, we just... um...” He was struggling, trying to be sensitive but also extremely curious, “...do you speak Russian?”

She calmed a bit, seeing that none of them looked angry, but didn’t relax. Mike squeezed her hand again, and she bit her lip, looking up at him, face honest, and nodded, admitting what they had discovered was true.

“That’s so friggin’ *cool*,” Lucas blurted, eyes full of respect, “what did you say just now?”

Her brow furrowed and she thought carefully, trying to remember exactly what she said in her sleep-induced tirade.

“Um,” she suddenly looked embarrassed, cheeks reddening, “I s-said, ‘You bleat like sh-sheep’.”

Dustin choked on his laughter and Will snickered despite his resolve, and she blushed brighter. Mike, by some miracle of God, managed to keep a straight face. He tried to think of something to say, but only managed to peep out a surprised sounding, “Oh”.

El looked down, biting her lip, and he realized she was trying not to cry again. Her voice was broken when she spoke.

“I’m sorry.”

Mike was suddenly lost, not entirely sure why she was crying this time, and looked to Will for help. Will shrugged, equally clueless and concerned. Lucas and Dustin calmed down at the sight of her tears, exchanging worried glances.

“Why are you sorry, El?” Mike’s voice was gentle, but she shook her head, not easily consoled by his kind tone this time. Hot tears started pouring down her cheeks and she hiccuped, growing more distraught by the second. The boys were starting to get a bit uncomfortable and looked at Mike for a solution, since he was the one who usually handled her emotions best. He reached his hand out to her but she pushed it away, shrinking away from him and shook her head, her voice coming out in pieces, half sobs.

“I... I..” she could barely form the words, “I *lied*. I-I-I’m b-bad.”

Mike tried soothe her, alarmed at her sudden change in emotions.

“No, no... you just, you didn’t tell us,” he glanced at his friends for help but they just shrugged, useless, “that’s... different.”

“F-Friends d-d-don’t,” she inhaled deeply, not needing to finish the familiar sentiment but doing it anyway, “... *lie* .”

She was completely distraught now, openly sobbing into her hands, guilt and shame pouring down her face in salty tracks. Mike realized that he wouldn’t be able to convince her that what she did was okay, so he switched tactics, reaching forward and pulling her to his chest, letting her tears stain the front of his striped polo.

“Hey, hey it’s okay. We’re still your friends,” he rocked her gently, arms holding her firmly, trying to remember how his mom used to

comfort him when he was small, “sometimes friends lie anyways, but that doesn’t mean... we won’t just stop being your friends.”

She didn’t stop crying, but the sobs were becoming less violent, and he soothingly rubbed her back with one hand. Lucas had cautiously stood up and retreated to the kitchen, Dustin following soon after, sensing that this was something they couldn’t help with at the moment. Will stayed longer, but left after deciding that Mike could handle it. Now it was just Mike and El, the latter’s distraught face tucked into his chest as they sat on the floor, spilling out emotions she didn’t even know she had been bottling. It was almost two years worth of guilt at keeping the secret, from her friends, from her family, and from him.

“Hey,” his voice was soft and she finally was able to pry herself off of him, looking at him with red-rimmed eyes, her face a wet mess, “why did you, um...” he didn’t want to use the word but did, “...lie?”

“Your d-dad.” He raised his eyebrows, gut clenching, and she tried to explain, swallowing some of her emotions. “Poker, with... others. Before the first summer.”

He racked his brain, trying to think back to the spring right after she’d come back, and then remembered his dad having a poker night with some work buddies. The kids had been banished to the basement for the evening, told not to come upstairs unless it was absolutely necessary. El had gone up to use the bathroom, the basement one occupied, and had come down several minutes later looking paler than usual. She’d shrugged off Mike’s inquisitive glance, reassuring him that everything was fine, and he’d let himself get sucked back into the campaign, almost forgetting the incident entirely.

“Oh, I remember that. Wait, what– I mean, did someone...” his heart suddenly clenched in his chest as he imagined the worst scenario, “did someone try to hurt you?”

She shook her head again and continued.

“Talking about... r-ruskies. Commies.” She inhaled shakily. “Said... bad things, mean things about them.”

Mike was puzzled.

“But you’re not...”

He trailed off as she raised a fist, contorting her face angrily, imitating an angry man, the harsh words flowing easily as she repeated what she’d heard that night.

“Never let a goddamn Russian-speaking commie in my house! Kill them first!”

El’s mimicking ability was uncanny, a skill she rarely used but had mastered. Mike could almost hear his inebriated father yelling the words across the dinner table to his equally agitated friends and he sucked in a breath. She let her expression return to its passive state, but her eyes were rimmed with pain, her lip quivering slightly. She finished her story.

“Couldn’t tell. Didn’t... Didn’t want to be *bad*.” Her voice welled with misery and hurt. “I... I wanted to see you at your house,” she sucked in a shaky breath, clenching her hand into a fist and slamming it into her leg in frustration, “I-I’m s-s-so s-selfish.”

Her sentences, which she had been constructing so well these past few months, were broken back down into pieces that she had to force through her lips, much like when they’d first met. It made Mike angry and heartbroken to see her like this, and he cursed his dad’s hate-filled words and drunken idiocy.

“No, El, that’s... that isn’t— You’re not selfish, you were scared.” He looked down into her china doll eyes, hoping his words could fix her broken pieces. “He scared you, that’s what happened, but...” he got on up his knees, reaching forward to rest his arms on her shoulders reassuringly, “he wouldn’t do that. And I... I wouldn’t let him hurt you. *Ever*. ”

Ted Wheeler wasn’t necessarily a bad father, but he was essentially clueless when it came to most things, and Mike knew that if he’d had more than a few beers or glasses of scotch, he could get loud and mean and occasionally violent. Not that he’d ever hurt his family, but he’d broken a few things around the house before while in a drunken

rage. There was a very good chance that he'd been through several beers when he'd said those damning words that had scared El into lying, but Mike also knew that his father wouldn't follow through with any of his threats, particularly the death one.

"My dad... he says things sometimes when he's mad or drunk, but El, just because he hates the Russians and the war and stuff..." He reached out and wiped at her tear-stained face with a gentle hand, "it doesn't mean he'd hurt you, or hate you. You speak the language but it's not.. You don't, I mean— You're not a commie." His voice was strong. "You're not a threat just because you speak Russian. We would have understood. We know that."

She'd stopped crying, he'd noticed, but her hands were still resting on his chest. She hadn't looked up at him since she'd last spoken. He cleared his throat.

"Besides, I, uh, I think my dad kinda likes you, um," at that she looked up, face still a mess but eyes curious and unbelieving. He continued with a smile, "No, I'm serious, you're the only one who laughs at his lame jokes at dinner anymore. And, uh, that one time you made that pie? The blueberry one?"

She shuddered, remembering what a mess that had been. She had been so proud of her first solo baking creation that she had brought it over to share with the Wheelers. It had been mediocre at best, but if she was honest it had been pretty bad.

"Yeah, he said it was better than my mom's . "

That made El snort, part laughter, part disbelief. Like her pitiful kitchen tinkering could ever rival the masterchef that was Karen Wheeler. Mike grinned, encouraged by her almost-laughter.

"No, I'm serious. He ate almost the whole thing. I didn't even..." he stumbled on his words, catching himself before he admitted he'd barely been able to eat that pie, "um, uh, nevermind, the point is that just because my dad said something like that, it doesn't mean he would ever do it. You don't have to be afraid to talk about that kind of stuff. If you're afraid at all. Not... not to me."

El's face had mostly remained neutral, but she could tell he was right, as usual, and she nodded, reaching up to wipe at her snot-covered face. He reached out to stroke her hair gently away from where it was stuck to her chin, and she looked up into his eyes, grateful.

“Okay.”

Mike breathed a sigh of relief, which was promptly echoed from the doorway to the kitchen. He looked up just in time to see a mop of curly hair disappear around the corner. *Eavesdropping little shits....* He flushed at the thought that they might have been listening to him comfort her. It was fine if they had heard her story, but he knew his soft words and reassurances would just be turned into teasing one-liners he would be annoyed with later.

He glanced back at El just in time to see her face close in on his, and then she was pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek and he flushed even brighter. She pulled back, eyes still red but filled with soft emotion.

“Wha–” he coughed, “What was that for?”

“Apology,” she stated, “And... thank you, Mike.”

He tried to casually shrug it off, but his cheeks were still tinged pink.

“A-Anytime.”

His eyes glanced at her lips and she seemed to share his thought, leaning in, getting closer, her breath warm on his face–

Thunk!

A box of tissues bounced off of Mike's chest and landed between them. There was a badly-stifled snort of laughter from the doorway and El looked down at the box, while Mike glared in the direction it had come from. The moment had been successfully ruined, and she made that even more clear by grabbing a tissue and blowing her nose, honking loudly, making him snort out a laugh. He tried to help her out, wiping at her still wet cheeks with another tissue and she batted him away playfully.

The guys crept back out of the kitchen, relieved to see that the crisis

had been handled. Will patted Mike appreciatively on the shoulder as he plopped back on the couch, Dustin joining him, Lucas heading back for the La-Z-Boy. El had finished cleaning herself up, crumpling the dirty tissues in her palm, and slowly got up to throw them away and freshen up in the bathroom. As soon as she was out of earshot, Dustin grabbed Mike's shoulder.

"What was all of that? Why was she all..." He made an over exaggerated crying face. Mike rolled his eyes.

"You guys didn't hear what she said?" He asked.

Dustin shook his head so he decided to try and explain without exposing El's fears or his dad's stupidity too much.

"It was just something she... my dad said something that scared her, about the commies and stuff," the boys exchanged looks, all too familiar with the worried whispers that followed that kind of talk, "and she thought he, uh, well, that he meant her because she could speak the language..."

He looked towards the doorway where she'd disappeared, face melancholy.

"She was just... I think she felt guilty too. For not telling us."

Lucas piped up, repeating what she'd said earlier, face surprisingly sober.

"Friends don't lie."

They sat in silence. None of them were mad that she hadn't told them, especially after the explanation about her being afraid, but the fact that they had never figured it out was so damn... aggravating. All four of them were trying to think of anything she might have said that would have given her away, but they were struggling, with the exception of Mike. He opened his mouth, but then shut it again, deciding to ask her about it before he told the guys.

"So she really was speaking another language..." Dustin looked disappointed, and when they looked at him questioningly, he clarified, "In her sleep. The mumbling?"

They nodded and he sighed again.

“I was really hoping it was aliens.”

A throw pillow hit him right in the face and Lucas snickered from his place in the chair. Dustin threw it back and gave his friend the finger and right then El walked back in, taking in the situation and smiling softly, happy that her friends really weren't mad at her. Her face was still a little blotchy, but she'd washed and now *looked* like she felt better. She plopped back down between Mike's legs and leaned back, readjusting the pillow with a yawn. Dustin restarted the movie and before they knew it she was out again, this time quiet, her face relaxed.

By the time they had finished, the sun was beginning to set, the temperature dropping enough that they could all bike home without wanting to die. Mike volunteered to accompany Will and El home as usual, which everyone knew was just an excuse for him to hang out with El longer even though he always claimed it was so they wouldn't have to ride through Mirkwood alone. But no one said anything and they all took off into the darkened streets, El racing Dustin and swearing softly in Russian when he beat her by mere inches. She seemed relaxed and content, no longer afraid to conceal her secret. By the time they arrived at the Byers house, she was laughing at something Will had said about “bleating sheep”, her earlier remark already coming back to bite her in the ass. Will took both her bike and his own around the side of the house, and El turned back to Mike to say goodbye.

He put his kickstand down and got off his bike, walking towards her, scratching his neck, wanting to ask a question. She seemed surprised that he hadn't left right away, but looked up at him, curious. He'd spurted up the last few months and now towered above her and the others, which only annoyed her when she was this close and had to crane her neck up to see his face.

“Um, El...”

“Yes?”

He paused, wanting to ask her about the time he now suspected she'd

spoken to him in Russian. It had been over Christmas break, all five had gathered in his basement for a barely-approved sleepover. Mike had woken up in the middle of the night needing a glass of water, but when he'd sat up he'd heard El whimpering pitifully. He had claimed the spot on the floor next to the couch where she was sleeping and at the familiar sound of her sobs he had quickly shaken her awake from the nightmare that was making her cry in her sleep. One pleading look from her tear-filled eyes and the next thing he knew they were snuggled up together on the couch, the way they used to when she'd first come back and stayed at his house. He'd fallen asleep first as she stroked his hair, but right before he dozed off she'd said something softly, more to herself than to him. He thought he'd dreamt the strange words but now he realized that they were just spoken in a language he didn't understand.

“Um, what... what does ‘luchik’ mean? And.. tem... ‘temno’?” The words felt strange on his tongue and he hoped he was saying them right. Her face suddenly turned red, a rare occurrence, and she looked down, completely embarrassed.

“You... you heard that?” Her voice was quiet and he nodded, not wanting to push her.

“You don’t, um, you don’t have to tell me. If you don’t want...”

She shook her head, still flushed, trying to figure out the best way to translate what she’d said to him in that quiet moment. She remembered feeling like the whole world was asleep, her secret safe as she affectionately stroked his hair, gazing down at her favorite person, whispering the word that seemed to fit him better than anything she could think of in English.

“Sunbeam.”

He blinked, confused, and she clarified.

“*Luchik* ... means sunbeam, but, um, like a... nickname.” El glanced up at him, her heart thudding. “*Tenmo* is dark because...” her hand came up and brushed at his coal-black hair, pushing it out of his inky eyes gently, and this time he flushed.

It was the best way she could think of describe him, a ray of light all raven-black, his ebony eyes always soft and warm when they looked at her. His freckles were a starry night, but his face and heart were better than a sunny day in spring, always open like his arms, always ready to hold her when she was afraid or scared or unsure. She wasn't sure what to call it, the shivery way her stomach felt when he kissed her, the way her heart sped up when he wrapped his arms around her and looked down into her eyes, the way he could calm her fears so quickly with his words. Every little thing he did for her she noticed, but she didn't understand why. Was there a name for that?

His hand reached up to hers, pulling it away from his hair and towards his lips. He brushed a kiss across her wrist, over the tattoo of who she used to be, and then let it drop, still keeping her palm pressed to his. Her breath shuddered out of her as he stepped closer, pulling her into his chest and wrapping his arms around her in a tight hug.

"I like it," he said softly, voice muffled by her hair.

She nestled her face into the front of his shirt, breathing him in, her embarrassment fading at his gentle acceptance. For a moment they stood there, not noticing as Will peeked his head around the house to see if his sister was coming. He stared at them for a second before sneaking away, deciding to use the back door and not disturb whatever was happening between the two of them.

"Hey El?" Mike's voice finally broke the comfortable silence.

"Yes?"

"Is it... um, can I ask--"

"Yes."

She didn't know what he wanted to ask but she was more than willing to let him ask anything. Mike paused and she pulled away enough to look up at him, eyes bright and sure. He gulped a bit, his heart speeding up like it always did when she looked at him like that. He wasn't sure where his question would lead but he his curiosity

was killing him.

“Um, why do you know Russian?”

Her mind flashed back to her days in the lab and she shut her eyes and shuddered. Mike wanted to punch himself in the face.

“Spying.”

He quit insulting himself internally and looked down at her again, noticing her slight unease.

“You don’t have to talk about it.”

“No... it’s okay.” Her voice was sure and strong, nothing like the shattered pieces he’d had to pry out of her earlier. “They brought someone. Every day. Big man, looked mean but... nice. Like... Benny,” there was a note of sorrow in her voice, but she continued, “when I did well, said the words right, he would call me that.”

“Call you what?”

“*Luchik.* ”

Mike never asked her about the lab. He’d mostly only heard the horrors, the dark closets and dying animals, words whispered to him as he held her in his arms, her body shaking as she sobbed out the truths of her nightmares. But this, this tiny spot of light that had kept her buoyant in the sea of her captivity, it made it easier to understand how she had made it out only partially broken.

“I’m glad,” he started, and she looked up at him, brow wrinkled, confused as to why he would be glad about anything she had said, “I mean, uh, I’m glad that you had that guy. To be nice to you... back then.”

She nodded in agreement. He bit his lip, and glanced at her, not sure what to say but not wanting to let her go just yet.

“So, um... sunbeam?”

She nodded, more enthusiastically.

“It fits you. Better than me.”

He opened his mouth to argue that, but realized she wasn't done.

“It was, um, dark... like night time. Always scared and sad because... Papa. And the... the closet,” she shuddered again. “But then... you were there. In the rain. And everything was bright.”

“I mean, I was shining a flashlight in your face.”

El snorted out a laugh and smacked his chest softly, looking up at his grinning face and shaking her head at his joke. It had broken the slight tension, and though he had definitely caught the full meaning of her words, he kept his blush at bay by laughing back.

“It's true!”

She smacked him lightly again and he put up his arms in defense, their soft laughter filling the warm summer night. Shaking her head, she poked his side affectionately and whispered another foreign word, voice borderline cynical.

“Durak. ”

He looked at her, an eyebrow raised.

“What does that mean? Handsome? Amazing?”

She laughed outright, sides heaving, and he stepped back, startled by the outburst, almost tripping over his bike. He quickly caught the handlebars before it tipped over and then hopped on to keep from repeating the incident, sitting astride and facing her, confused by her near hysterics. She was shaking her head again, and he kicked the kickstand up while he waited for her to calm down. Coming up next to him, she pressed a quick kiss to his cheek as a goodbye, still giggling softly before pulling away and translating the mystery word.

“It means idiot.”

Mike could hear her laughing as he peddled down the gravel driveway, the sound echoing through the woods like a gentle melody.

He smiled the whole way home.

Author's Note:

okay so my argument for her speaking russian is pretty simple. her whole existence is dependent on her being used against the commies, and up until the flashback we're shown where we (and brenner) find out she's able to project the voices through the speakers, it would make sense for them to assume she would have to understand russian in order to bring back information. so teaching her russian alongside english totally makes sense. it also might explain her less than stellar verbal skills... who says she's not more comfortable speaking russian? but no one in season one ever talks to her in russian, so why would she speak it then?

anywhoo that's my explanation and if you hate it, well, whatever. if you like it feel free to use it. i wouldn't mind a lil credit but eh, if i see any stories or things with her speaking russian i'll probably be too excited to care.

hopefully i'll have some more stories coming out next month! i've got two big ones (as in multi chapter ones) cooking as well as few other one-shots.

p.s. to any russian speakers, I APOLOGIZE. i'm like an 1/8th russian but i know jack shit about the language so i did the best i could with google and online translators. if you have any corrections PLEASE FEEL FREE TO LET ME KNOW. i try not be ignorant if i can help it and i welcome any criticism you may have about my terrible attempts at translations.

p.s.s. thank you to sisko_fan for being willing to correct my terrible attempts at translating english to russian. bless you.